United Nations A/57/271

General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 August 2002

Original: English

Fifty-seventh session
Item 97 of the provisional agenda*
Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly

Special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is issued pursuant to paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 56/205.

To consult more effectively with Habitat Agenda partners, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) organized, in April 2002, the first biennial World Urban Forum, which serves as an expert advisory body to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat on international cooperation in shelter and urban development. The results of the Forum are being submitted to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Advisory Committee of Local Authorities held its fifth annual meeting during the 2002 Forum, where it articulated its concern — also to be transmitted to the World Summit — that implementation of local action plans is often hampered by lack of financial resources and institutional support. The Regional Technical Cooperation Division, as the operational arm of UN-Habitat, is increasingly performing normative activities in connection with the Millennium Declaration goals and the Habitat Agenda. It is now active in over 60 developing countries. UN-Habitat encourages Governments and Habitat Agenda partners to disseminate the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and other major United Nations policy documents in order to reformulate their objectives as national and local policy.

* A/57/150.

** Submission of the present report was delayed owing to consultations.

02-50999 (E) 110902

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A number of recommendations are made in the report with a view to further strengthening collaborative efforts in support of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and the Millennium Development target of significantly improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers around the world.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 56/205, the General Assembly recognized the need for renewed political will and for the mobilization and allocation of new and additional resources at the national and international levels in order to achieve full and accelerated implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and to implement fully all the commitments undertaken in the Habitat Agenda.

2. In paragraph 6 of the same resolution, the Assembly requested the relevant bodies of the United Nations system, including the specialized agencies, programmes, funds and regional commissions, as well as the World Bank and regional development banks, consistent with their respective mandates, to support fully the effective implementation, at all levels, of the Habitat Agenda and the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium.

3. In paragraph 7, the Assembly invited local authorities and other Habitat Agenda partners to contribute to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and encouraged them to participate in the World Urban Forum and the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities, advisory bodies to the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

4. In paragraph 8, the Assembly urged the Executive Director of UN-Habitat to assess the role and funding of the regional programme activity centres of the Programme with a view to providing improved technical cooperation services to Governments to implement the Habitat Agenda and the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium at all levels.

5. In paragraph 9, the Assembly invited Governments and the Habitat Agenda partners, including local authorities, to facilitate the dissemination of the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and invited the Executive Director of the Programme to transmit the outcomes of the relevant intergovernmental processes relating to sustainable human settlements development to the preparatory processes of the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, bearing in mind the relevant decisions of the preparatory processes of those two conferences.

II. Progress on implementation

A. Habitat Agenda partners

The World Urban Forum

6. In its resolution 18/5 of 16 February 2001, the then Commission on Human Settlements requested the Executive Director to, inter alia, promote a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty into a new Urban Forum, with a view to strengthening the coordination of international support to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

7. The unified World Urban Forum focuses on international cooperation in shelter and urban development and serves as an advisory body to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat on these issues. To this end, the Forum (to be held biennially in years alternating with those in which the Governing Council of UN-Habitat meets) facilitates the exchange of experience and the advancement of collective knowledge among cities and their development partners. As an initiative in global civic engagement, the World Urban Forum places strong emphasis on the participation of Habitat Agenda partners and relevant international programmes, funds and agencies, thus ensuring their inclusion in the identification of new issues, the sharing of lessons learned and the exchange of best practices and good policies. Another function of the World Urban Forum is the elimination of overlap and the identification of synergies among development agencies in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Reports and recommendations from the World Urban Forum will be submitted by the Executive Director to the Governing Council at the biennial sessions for consideration and appropriate action.

8. Participation in the World Urban Forum is open-ended, but is in principle limited to representatives from national Governments and Habitat Agenda partners. The latter include local authorities, the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, human settlements professionals, research institutions and academies of science, the private, business and

non-profit sectors, foundations, relevant United Nations organizations and other international agencies.

9. Pursuant to the aforementioned request of the Commission on Human Settlements, the first session of the unified World Urban Forum was held at the headquarters of UN-Habitat in Nairobi from 29 April to 3 May 2002. The main themes of the Forum were sustainable urban development and cities without slums. The session was organized by UN-Habitat in collaboration with various Habitat Agenda partners. About 1,200 participants from over 80 countries attended the meeting, including 400 governmental experts, 100 representatives of local authorities, 350 representatives of NGOs and more than 200 slum dwellers and United Nations agencies. Organized in dialogue sessions, the Forum was considered by all partners as very successful in its role as global think tank on urbanization strategies. Two series of dialogues, involving close to 100 panellists, were held in parallel. The thematic dialogues addressed the issues of urban governance and the right to the city, the Millennium Development goal on cities without slums, decentralization and city-to-city cooperation, the international role of NGOs in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, security of residential tenure and the way to stop forced evictions, as well as monitoring urban conditions and trends. The dialogues on sustainable urbanization, designed as a pre-conference input to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, addressed the role of cities in national and international development, the sustainability of cities, the rural dimension of sustainable development, the management of the HIV/AIDS pandemic at the local level and water and sanitation for the urban poor.

10. The World Urban Forum elaborated a number of partnership implementation proposals to be presented to the World Summit on Sustainable Development as well as recommendations which will be considered by the Governing Council of UN-Habitat at its next session in May 2003. The report of the session was disseminated by UN-Habitat in May 2002.

Advisory Committee of Local Authorities

11. Pursuant to Commission on Human Settlements resolution 17/18, the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities was constituted in 2000 in Venice, Italy, by the mayors of Allahabad, India, Barcelona, Spain, Dakar, Dubai, Hull, Canada, Johannesburg, South Africa, Moscow, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Tunis and Venice, the presidents of the International Union of Local Authorities, of the United Towns Organization and of regional associations of local authorities from Africa (African Union of Local Authorities), the Arab States (Arab Towns Organization) and Latin America (International Union of Local Authorities-Latin America).

12. The main thrust of the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities is to (i) offer a positive and innovative vision of the future of the world's cities; (ii) contribute intellectually and substantively to the definition and implementation of the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure and the Global Campaign on Urban Governance coordinated by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat); and (iii) interact with the Commission on Human Settlements and other United Nations governing bodies to strengthen the global dialogue between central and local government.

13. At its fifth meeting, held in Nairobi in April 2002, Advisory Committee members stressed that local authorities are instrumental in the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, specifically in building bridges between development, finance and trade organizations. Local authorities and their associations, particularly in developing countries, have concrete solutions to the development challenges facing their cities and countries. However, the realization of action plans is often hampered by the lack of financial resources and institutional support. This message is to be conveyed to the international community during the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

14. In close consultation with local government leaders around the world, the World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination, an umbrella organization of local authorities' associations and a key UN-Habitat partner in the Advisory Committee, has produced a draft local government declaration, expressing local authorities' views with regard to the outcomes of Rio+10 and stressing their expectations for setting targets for economic, environmental and social development in Johannesburg. The declaration sets out local government principles and commitments in relation to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and requests actions by the international associations of cities and local authorities, national Governments, the United Nations and the international community. The Advisory Committee agreed to hold a special meeting (tentatively) in Johannesburg on 28 August 2002, to examine the progress made before the

adoption of the final text of the declaration during the local government session.

The United Nations system

15. UN-Habitat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, has the lead role within the United Nations system for coordinating activities in the field of human settlements. The Programme has been designated as the focal point for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda — the global plan of action adopted by the international community at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, Turkey, in June 1996. The global commitments and goals of the Habitat Agenda provide the mandate for the work of UN-Habitat — translated into an integrated work programme. The Programme's activities contribute to the overall objective of the United Nations system to reduce poverty by assisting countries to improve the living conditions of the poor in urban and rural settlements.

16. Many United Nations agencies participated in the World Urban Forum, which is designed to encourage Habitat Agenda partners at all levels to form partnerships in addressing agreed priorities for sustainable human settlements development and adequate shelter.

17. At the World Urban Forum meeting in Nairobi earlier this year, several key partners within the United Nations system reported on their efforts to implement the commitments made in the Habitat Agenda and the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium. The World Bank and UN-Habitat have also entered into a strategic partnership for sustainable urban development and poverty reduction in the Cities Alliance.

18. Recognizing the need to support sustainable development initiatives in cities, decisions taken during the seventh special session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Cartagena, Colombia, in 2002, called upon UNEP to strengthen its cooperation with UN-Habitat at the national and local levels, particularly, in developing a new urban environment policy. UNEP and UN-Habitat have been working closely together through, for example, the Sustainable Cities Programme to implement both Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda and to support cities in developing innovative and integrated approaches to sustainable urban development.

19. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is now working with UN-Habitat to establish a Habitat Agenda focal point within selected UNDP country offices. This will assist the Resident Coordinator system in providing both national and international expertise in formulating the human settlements and urban poverty components of the Common Country Assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

B. Regional Programme Activity Centres

20. The UN-Habitat mandate combines normative functions and technical cooperation activities. The normative functions set standards, propose norms and principles and describe best practices. Operational activities consist of capacity-building programmes and demonstration projects as well as technical assistance to requesting countries in the form of projects and advisory services. UN-Habitat is therefore both an advocate of good policies and an agent for change, combining these two necessary and mutually supportive undertakings. As a result of its revitalization, which included an assessment of its regional activity centres, UN-Habitat has reoriented its operational activities to support its normative responsibilities related to the Habitat Agenda, the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and the relevant targets of the Millennium Declaration. Within the overall priorities and substantive direction of the UN-Habitat work programme, including work with the Cities Alliance, the main function of the Regional Technical Cooperation Division, as the operational arm of UN-Habitat, is to put in place and test UN-Habitat policies and strategies at the regional, national and local levels.

21. The Division's work is carried out by three regional offices: the Regional Office for Africa and the Arab States; the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific; and the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. These offices are supported by the Technical Advisory Branch and the other divisions/subprogrammes of UN-Habitat from its headquarters in Nairobi. The Division has a portfolio of over 150 ongoing projects and about 50 pipeline projects in 61 developing and transition countries in addition to substantive advisory services for project

formulation and development. Developing countries now participate more actively in technical cooperation, building their capacities, creating conditions to reduce poverty through slum upgrading and the implementation of related Habitat Agenda recommendations.

22. While the regional offices were originally concerned with emphasis on carrying out technical cooperation activities, they now increasingly perform core functions in connection with the normative activities of UN-Habitat. In particular, they are now responsible for implementing the two global campaigns in the countries of their regions. The broadening functions include representation of UN-Habitat at the regional level, liaising with United Nations regional commissions, supporting regional conferences, as well as providing a knowledge base and public information.

23. Since their establishment, the regional offices (previously regional units) have been funded primarily from extrabudgetary resources generated by operational projects (overhead income covering support costs), in combination with financial and in-kind support from host cities.

24. Financial viability is a critical concern and needs to be constantly assessed in light of the changing environment for funding technical cooperation activities, especially where more than half of the programme activities are in the least developed countries, which do not have the financial capacity to cost-share operational activities. The challenge is to diversify the sources of funding both for the core operating costs of the regional offices and for human settlements activities. In this regard, UN-Habitat is presently building on the aforementioned financial study to develop a range of options for strengthening the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation.

C. Dissemination of the Declaration

25. UN-Habitat, through its information outreach programmes, is in constant contact with Governments and Habitat Agenda partners, encouraging them to disseminate the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and other major United Nations policy documents in order to promote the translation of their goals and commitments into national and local realities. Several Governments and partners have established a dialogue at both the national and local levels by organizing conferences and consultative meetings on elements of the Declaration. One of the functions of the World Urban Forum was to help facilitate such dialogues at the global level.

26. UN-Habitat produces a considerable number of, inter alia, publications, reports, studies, best practices, technical guides, brochures and policy documents for dissemination. This information is organized through an information and knowledge management system that offers a reliable and effective way to distribute greater amounts of information. While there is a regular flow of information moving from UN-Habitat to Governments and to partners, information flowing towards UN-Habitat is still insufficient for adequate monitoring of progress in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the Declaration. Pending improved two-way information flows, it is premature to determine the extent to which the Declaration has been disseminated by Governments, local authorities and Habitat Agenda partners.

D. Intergovernmental processes

27. The participation and contribution of UN-Habitat to the International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002) consisted of an official address to the plenary by the Executive Director of the Programme, a parallel event entitled "Sustainable financing of the housing finance system" and a press conference on the issue of affordable housing financing.

28. The Executive Director's address to the plenary, delivered on 18 March 2002, drew attention to a number of issues of relevance to the Conference, including poverty reduction and mainstreaming of partners, both of which had been emphasized in recent General Assembly resolutions on human settlements, as well as in the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium, adopted by the General Assembly in June 2001. The Declaration stressed that if the world is to succeed in attaining the Millennium Development target of significantly improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020, it was essential to create viable housing finance institutions capable of addressing the shelter needs of the urban poor. The address also highlighted the work of UN-Habitat in housing finance, including the envisaged strengthening

of the role of the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation as a global source of seed capital for housing and infrastructure development.

29. UN-Habitat contributions to the Conference are also reflected in paragraphs 16, 18 and 19 of the Monterrey Consensus document with respect to inclusion of shelter, housing and mortgage finance.

30. UN-Habitat, in cooperation with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, organized a parallel event on the issue of sustainable financing of the housing finance system. Part of the outcome of this parallel event is reflected in the UN-Habitat monograph on "Sustainable financing of the housing finance system: the experiences of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Finance Corporation". This monograph will be widely disseminated for the mutual exchange of experience and learning among Governments and their relevant institutions, as well as among other stakeholders in the housing finance business.

31. Finally, a press conference on "home ownership through housing finance" was jointly held by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat and the Mayor of Monterrey on 19 March 2002. The press conference highlighted the important role of effective national housing finance mechanisms in addressing the housing needs of the urban poor, including slum upgrading.

32. A number of references to shelter and human settlements development appear in the draft Plan of Implementation submitted to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. They include a reiteration of the Millennium Development target on slum upgrading, the agreement to improve access to land, adequate shelter and basic services for the poor, the commitment to enhance the role and capacity of local authorities in implementing local Agenda 21 programmes through partnerships, as well as the recognition of the need to support African countries in their efforts to implement the Habitat Agenda and to develop efficient and effective governance systems in cities and other human settlements.

III. Recommendations

33. Governments and their Habitat Agenda partners are encouraged to send reports to UN-Habitat on a regular basis regarding the adequacy and usefulness of settlements and shelter information so that UN-Habitat may assess both the quality of information and the effectiveness of sharing mechanisms.

34. UN-Habitat, in collaboration with other United Nations entities as well as all Habitat Agenda partners, should continue to develop an inclusive process for all Governments, local authorities and their Habitat Agenda partners to evaluate and report on progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda, the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and the Millennium Declaration target of significantly improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers.

35. Member States are encouraged to strengthen and institutionalize National Habitat Committees as broad-based platforms for national- and local-level preparation and implementation of plans of action based on the Habitat Agenda, Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and the Millennium Development target of significantly improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers around the world.